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AUTHOR	Lillemyr, Ole Fredrik; Fagerli, Oddvar; Sobstad, Frode
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ABSTRACT

This monograph describes an alternative model for early childhood care and education involving a complex and integrated system that allows for more collaboration among early childhood care and education activities. The model, with its emphasis on values in all educational practices, is intended to promote a more global and total approach to children's development and hence avoid professional fragmentation. Following a foreword on UNESCO's early childhood initiatives and an introduction, the document discusses: (1) the model's definitions and main perspectives (including value-based theory and practice, a holistic rather than fragmented approach, and a more open educational system); (2) value principles for the model (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, democracy, multiculturalism, ethical responsibility and accountability, the value of play, and a new professionalism); (3) the issues of play, learning, and development (including children's play as a foundation, the importance of children's play in education, consequences for our understanding of learning, and varied forms of play); (4) details of the proposed model; and (5) developing early childhood education theory. (Contains 18 references.) (EV)

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Action Research in Family and Early Childhood

A Global Perspective on Early Childhood Care and Education:

A Proposed Model

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Ole Fredrik Lillemyr, Oddvar Fagerli & Frode Søbstad,
Queen Maud's College of Early Childhood Education
(Trondheim, Norway)

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Ole Fredrik Lillemyr, Oddvar Fagerli & Frode Søbstad,
Queen Maud's College of Early Childhood Education
(Trondheim, Norway)

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Ole Fredrik Lillemyr, Oddvar Fagerli & Frode Søbstad are professors at Queen Maud's College of Early Childhood Education, in Trondheim, Norway. They can be contacted at Queen Maud's College of Early Childhood Education, Th. Owesens gt. 18, N-7044 Trondheim, Norway for more information on this model; and can also be reached by email at Ole.Lillemyr@dmmh.no, OFA@dmmh.no, FSO@dmmh.no respectively.

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Foreword

Learning begins at birth. All children are born with the capacity to learn, the most solid base on which any society can build. Of the more than 800 millions 0 to 6 year old children in the world, less than a third benefit from early childhood education programmes.

The challenge is enormous because of the demographic pressures and increased poverty that most countries experience. Yet, efficient and low-cost options for early childhood exist, and are adapted to the needs of children, the life conditions of families, the culture and resources of countries. Their implementation depends more on creating adequate political and social will than on any other factor.

UNESCO's actions in Early Childhood and Family Education

Background

Most countries have been going through a period of rapid population growth, increased urbanisation, important social disparities, great numbers of out-of-school children and the alarming progress of AIDS. Disadvantaged families and young children are subject to its worst effects. UNESCO's actions have addressed the issues of early childhood care and education by strengthening national and regional capacities in the areas of research, training, programming and information, to enable early childhood professionals to design appropriate solutions to the national needs in early childhood.

Responding to Government priorities, commitment and participation

National authorities are seeking to strengthen early childhood programmes - in particular if they are community-based, improve their quality and content, as well as the training of all those involved in early childhood activities. They also want to ensure that these programmes cover children between 0 and 6, and not just those between 3 and 6 years, and are, in some cases, in the process of establishing national early childhood programmes. Regarding women and families, a number of countries wish to increase information and training regarding Family Life Education and legislation in favour of women and families, as well as putting into practice and teaching the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In each country, a number of resource persons and institutions exist in the area of Early childhood, service provision and materials production. Thus the following are often identified as priority areas regarding children and women where outside support would be beneficial:

- Initial and in-service Training: early childhood personnel, social workers, trainers, as well as vocational training for women.
- Information/documentation on children and families: strengthening of available resources, computerization of data collection and processing.
- Children's Rights: training in the area of teaching Children's Rights, introduction of Children's Rights at various levels of the educational system, information campaigns, materials production.

- Family Life Education: setting up of national programmes, production of resource and teaching materials, identification of partners and resources.
- Early childhood services: identification of national partners and resources, strengthening services for young children including disabled and marginalised children, support for integrated and multidisciplinary services.

General objectives of UNESCO's early childhood initiatives

To support and strengthen the work of staff and personnel concerned with the well being and welfare of young children (from birth to 8), by :

- focusing efforts on early child development and education, family education, and the mobilization of both modern and traditional resources to improve children's development and well-being, increase their health, self-esteem and learning capacities and improve the skills of families and communities.
- sponsoring regional seminars and training sessions so that national teams can compare experiences and practices, and find ways to make them evolve.
- encouraging the development of innovative, alternative solutions well adapted to the needs of children and the life conditions of families.
- designing training modules for initial and refresher training courses on different topics related to early childhood.
- promoting reflection and information exchange on young children and families, through surveys on the state of early childhood and national inventories of early childhood resources.
- encouraging the development of early childhood networks at national and regional levels.

Further enquiries

Early Childhood and Family Education Unit
ED/BAS/ECF, UNESCO
7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France
tel: (33-1) 45 68 08 12
fax: (33-1) 45 68 56 27 / 28

http://www.education.unesco.org/educprog/ecf/index.htm

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A Global Perspective on Early Childhood Care and Education:

A Proposed Model

I Introduction

The most important feature of the model presented here is the emphasis on *values* in our educational thinking. A value-oriented and scientific basis should provide rich possibilities to see the child as a unique human being with societal rights. In this regard, our approach is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989), emphasising *the best interest of the child* as the main issue. This global perspective includes both the child as a whole, and all children in the world. Promoting a meaningful life for children will always be based on values. However, a value orientation alone is not enough, so we must also rely on research on young children and the institutions that care for and educate them.

II Definition and main perspectives

We define *early childhood care and education* as activities related to reflection, planning, preparation and implementation for the upbringing and education of children below school-age. "Education" is a word usually associated with school and the whole educational system. We would like to broaden this concept and focus more on planning and reflection on upbringing, instruction and education, especially concerning children under 10 (Fagerli, Lillemyr and Søbstad 2000).

Early childhood care and education is a dynamic sector of research, education and practical life. It carries traditions from the past, showing new generations of professionals and parents how to understand children, how to pass on knowledge from one generation to another, and how to bring children into areas of valued competence.

New kinds of understanding always put pressure on such traditions. Established understanding is often challenged by new knowledge and values: Why should the father always be the best qualified to take decisions for all family members? Are boys really smarter in mathematics, and will they by nature be better leaders than girls?

In many cases, better communication and the possibility to get to know different people and cultures will give impulses to observe one's own ways of thinking, feeling and doing. Once we learn to know others, we may start comparing our diverse ways of upbringing and education.

The authors - educators at Queen Maud's College in Trondheim, Norway - developed a model for working with early childhood care and education. The basic *perspectives* behind this model are the following:

- A value-based theory and practice
- A holistic rather than a fragmented approach
- A more open educational system

A value-based theory and practice

The basic principle for this perspective is the core principle found in the Convention on the Rights of the Child: *"the best interest of the Child"*. The UN Declaration of Human Rights should also serve as a basic document for all education initiatives.

This focus is not obviously used in care and education. In many sectors of society, as well as in institutions and in daily activities, children's needs and their best interests are often given second or lesser priority because of the weak position children actually have in many matters. In daycare institutions, there might be a scarcity of places for children who need a good quality caring and stimulating environment. In schools, children may be receiving a lower priority due to political decisions, economical priorities, etc. Parents, living through conflicts, may take decisions convenient to their own lives, which lay heavy burdens upon their children.

We feel that it is our duty as professional educators to plan, work and evaluate actions in accordance with the best interest of the child.

A holistic rather than a fragmented approach

We want to establish full co-operation among professionals responsible for the care and education of the child, in collaboration with parents. The child should enjoy a daily life where life in daycare and at home is experienced as a unity. Usually parents take part in the planning and evaluation in daycare institutions, and the staff does its best to support parents in the upbringing of their children. In some cases, the child will experience the daycare institution as a calm, safe and caring place where she/he feels it is possible to be seen, heard and understood, even if life at home is too chaotic to feel secure during the other hours of the day.

Standards of tolerance should guide the creation of the atmosphere in institutions for children. Early childhood care and education establishes the premises for activities and relations between people, and should be tolerant enough to let all children, parents and staff live in a state of care, support and respect. Ethnicity and cultural background should be a source of interest and eagerness to get to know each other. As the world is made up of differences, daycare institutions should also reflect this.

Ensuring that a majority of professionals contribute to the care of young children, their families and neighbourhoods is a consequence of this proposed model. In most cases the competences of one profession are not enough to ensure the best interest of the child. This model would help contribute to cooperation among various professions.

There is a growing need for multicultural competencies for all professions working with preschool children and their families. Today, most industrialized countries are home to a growing number of immigrant children and families. The tendency to have several cultures represented in a daycare institution will continue to expand. Our responsibility as professionals should be to develop a competence to organise a caring and stimulating multicultural society for the young child. The same should happen for schools, older children and youth. We need to develop our educational competencies to meet this great challenge of tomorrow's socialisation process.

A more open educational system

There is a growing consciousness to see care and education in light of complex professional tasks, to be handled by more than one person as well as by more than one profession. We support this understanding, and find it important to contribute to this practice.

In the past, groups of children were organised with one responsible professional, often in a room. The ideal at that time was the educator as polyvalent, and the stability of the system implied that the child and the parents could have had the same "teacher". Today's societies are typically characterised by high mobility, groups of children with differing socio-cultural backgrounds, and parents with very different experiences with formal education.

Today we find it necessary to focus on educational teams, instead of relying on just one educator. Teams must professionally accept each person's and profession's

competence, and have had professional training in collaboration. Team collaboration should be based on respect for parents' rights regarding what they think is the best for their child, and on cooperation of high professional quality.

III Value principles for the model

Upbringing and education will always reflect values, no matter if those values are hidden or more openly defined in relation to educational aims, contents, methods and evaluation. In this model, we have chosen the following as basic value principles:

- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- democracy
- multiculturalism
- ethical responsibility and accountability
- the value of play
- a new professionalism

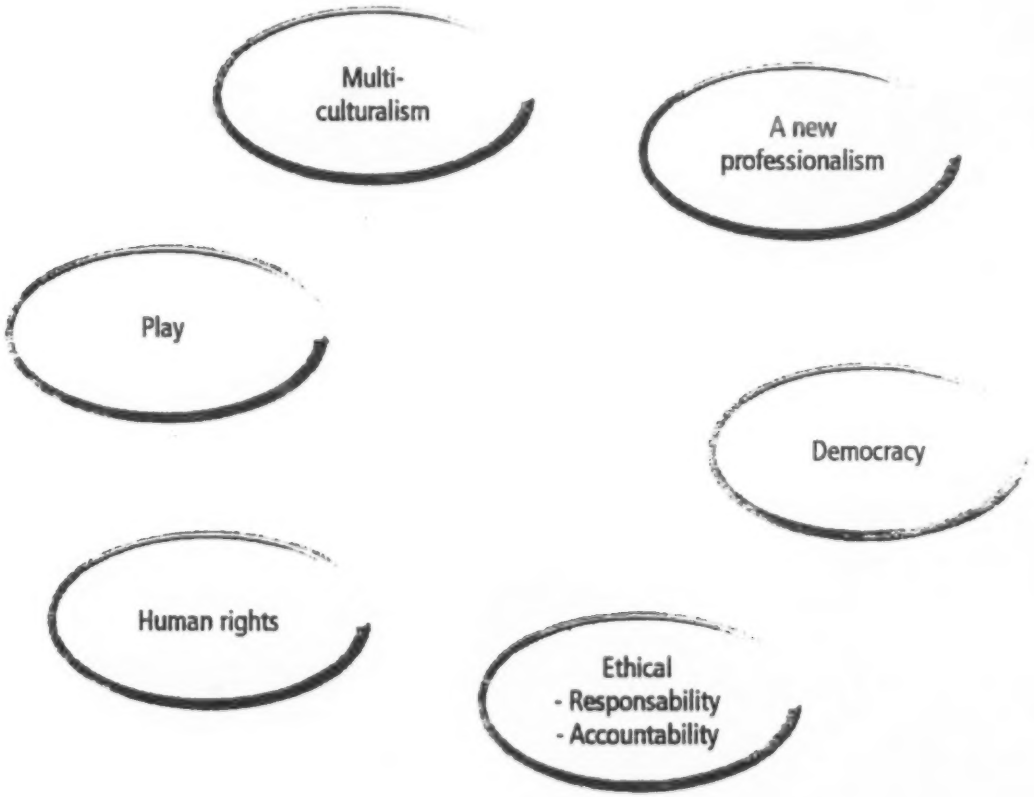

Figure 1 Value principles for early childhood care and education

As shown in Figure 1, the value principles are coloured circles in an ellipse indicating the field of early childhood care and education. The empty circles represent other possible value principles.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is in itself an example of human culture, and for this reason could be defined as both aim and content for early childhood care and education. It is important to tell children about human rights, about the United Nations and international norms for securing the rights of human beings. Human rights reflect the absolute value of each human being in the world. This is a basis for individual security and identity, and should be strongly felt by every child and person in the world:

> *I am of absolute value. I have certain rights as a person. Grown-ups should care for me when I have no capacity to take care of myself, and society has obligations towards me when I am a child. If these rights are abused, there are people and organisations with responsibility to put things in order for me.*

We hope that when this understanding flows into educational systems and family cultures, children will feel their value and will react against abuse - independent of cultures, gender, ethnicity - or whatever are the lines of demarcation separating those who have rights and those who do not.

When human rights are made fundamental to education, this will set standards for activities and attitudes. This will ensure that no abusing person or nation will continue the abuse without vocal opposition from concerned individuals and organisations.

Democracy

Democracy must be experienced and taught in day-to-day activities. Daycare institutions must be democratic mini-societies. This means that professionals must have the competence to organise institutions and activities in ways which demonstrate democratic values and principles. Staff should have the knowledge and skills needed to lead classes, institutions and groups in real democratic ways. This means that children should be taught how to function in a democracy, and what it means to the individual to feel the security of a functioning democracy.

Our model for early childhood care and education seeks to make visible qualities that are useful and valuable in educational and learning activities, such as relevant knowledge, responsibility and courage. There must be stimulation and guidance for children regarding how to develop this kind of competence.

"Rights" are important to experience along with the principle of human rights. *The right to argue against another person* and *the right to be a respected member of a minority group* are among such fundamental rights (Henriksen 1990). Minorities should be supported already during the early years, and professionals should be proud if their institution is actively practising the rights of minorities. Passive individuals may themselves be a threat to democracy, and passivity is often a fruit of experiencing the uselessness of actively defending any personal value. Our hope is to see the younger generations be trained for discourse, and being proud of experiencing how their resistance to unacceptable decisions may in the long run lead to a better solution for the whole group.

Applying such basic principles in early childhood education and care will have consequences for the training of both preschool and school teachers. They must themselves believe in democracy, promote democracy, and know how they can teach and guide children towards democracy. The same challenge will also concern other professionals working with young children. Furthermore, democracy has to be both a framework and an aim. Early childhood care and education is fundamental for personal, social and cultural life, laying the foundations for society. We will all be members of a society, and our way of being members of that society will have an impact on what our society and our future conditions will be like. Based on our proposed model, we would like to educate children for democracy. Democracy is vulnerable, and it needs

conscious, active and brave members to support it. We feel that the preschool age is important for education to become a democratic person, and we see our responsibility as educators as essential in this matter. Some personal qualities are easily observed in young children which are fundamental for building democracy: will, empathy, self-esteem, and courage.

Multiculturalism

Over the years, we have learned the terrible lessons of what disasters, fragmentation and dissociation do to people. Ethnicity can be exotic for tourists, and interesting for anthropologists, but is disastrous for those experiencing ethnic cleansing. A challenge to all educators is to develop knowledge and methods to create multicultural tolerance and to share our world in peaceful ways.

The understanding of culture as a tool to make communication possible between people (Hylland Eriksen 1997) will be strengthened in this model of early childhood care and education. The meaning of culture as the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next will be seen as important. We recommend the application of these themes to lay grounds for communication and mutual understanding. Children often meet each other spontaneously, with mutual interest and acceptance. This is an important issue for research. Many adults may change their opinions about history and traditions fundamentally, when they see culture as a basis for the future society in which their children will live.

The global village (McLuhan 1964) is a reality today, and it helps in building a «Global Society». Children and teenagers around the world are more than ever able to share a common, global view on many important matters in culture and society.

Ethical responsibility and accountability

Preschool children do not always know what is their own best interests. They need responsible adults to care for them, to take care of them and to educate them based on sound values. Both the professional and the non-professional person, being the caretakers of a child, have to behave towards the child and to work with the child in ways which correspond to certain ethical standards. Those may differ in nuances, but will not be in opposition to basic values. When the Norwegian Act requires daycare institutions to co-operate with parents, the ethical standards have to be worked out in a dialogue between professionals and parents. A common way of organising this is to develop national standards. As a professional way of dealing with such standards in educational work, professionals should be held accountable for their work, according to the standards set. This accountability should insure that ethics are not merely part of the rhetoric but are present in actual professional work.

The value of play

In our global perspective on early childhood care and education, children's play is seen as a fundamental value. Our conception of play is embedded in the value of play for its own sake. Since Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), children's play has been a main area in early childhood care and education. As play is a central component in the culture of children, it is also a component in society, and also a component of culture as such. Furthermore, play is not supposed to be of less importance than education. Play has a fundamental intrinsic motivation and helps to develop individuality as well as the social and communication dimensions in a child's life. Most theories of play point to intrinsic motivation or individual involvement as characteristic (Levy, 1978). Moreover, in play children make their choices independent of others, therefore fulfilling their own will. Nevertheless, in play children socialise and communicate at different levels as important aspects of play itself (Bateson 1973). Consequently, daycare institutions as well as schools have to realise the rich possibilities of learning through play for children.

Furthermore, the relations between play, creativity, aesthetics, and language are of great importance to educational programs.

A new professionalism

A social worker, an educator or another professional working in early childhood will seldom have the overall responsibility for the child all alone. This kind of responsibility belongs to the parents, but it is also a matter of professional team work across several professions.

In recognizing a professional's obligation to work for the best interest of the child, there is a three-fold challenge:

- being professional in securing one's profession competences, as an educator, a health-worker, etc. This includes knowing the limits of one's competences, as well as seeking the continuous development of these competences.
- knowledge about other relevant professions to provide total support for the child, including knowledge about the responsibilities of parents and the important resources they possess.
- professional collaboration with other professionals and parents.

Regarding this last point, children all too often are not being given what should be the best for them, because of a lack of professional collaboration by staff responsible for their care and education. The three components taken together call for a new perspective on professionalism based on a holistic approach to early childhood care and education.

IV The issues of play, learning and development

The issues of play, learning and development have been discussed in early childhood care and education literature for years. We now present our views on these issues.

Children's play as a foundation

"Living in a state of play, means living more humanly" wrote the German philosopher Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). We think that play should be seen as basic because of its importance for developing individuality as well as social competence (Levy 1978; Schwartzman 1978).

The capacity to pretend or "make believe", found to be central in play can function for adults as a main source for visions of a better future. Without such visions, there are no foundations for change on the individual level. In play we create our views, and we may realise them in the play-fictional reality. We see this as a personal competence which may give strength to a person of any age: to be able to put our own personal views in front, and work to see them realised. To secure human rights, democracy and multicultural respect, we all need visions and strength. If this is initiated in play, it should also be developed in formal education in various practical ways.

Another quality of play is the "internal locus of control", that is a personal impression of having capacity to control one's own thinking and doing. To give focus to every individual's rights and responsibilities, we need to organise environments which give children repeated experiences of having internal locus of control (Levy 1978). Many situations in children's lives lead parents and professionals to decide what is the best for the child. Such decisions should be accompanied by explanations and, on some occasions, by providing options to the child.

But most of all play is fun. Children find it enjoyable to play, and play is a pleasant way of meeting people and making friends. Children can learn during play that

if they want to continue playing with friends, it is essential to learn how to give and take. Thus self-confidence and the ability to share with others are important when playing. We think that the importance of play will be more clearly understood in the years to come.

In our opinion, the most important is the value of play for its own sake. Play is a way of living our lives. Play signifies that we are human beings and through it we explore our existence (Huizinga 1955). With this perspective as a basis, we can study how children will profit from play in relation to learning in educational settings.

The importance of children's play in education

It is increasingly acknowledged both in daycare institutions and primary schools that children's play accommodates children's interests and enhance their overall motivation (Pramling 1996; Wood & Attfield 1996; Dockett & Fleer 1999). Schools are increasingly using play as a motivational element in their programs, although many primary school teachers do not really include play in their everyday teaching. The failure to include children's play in education has occurred despite positive associations between play and learning. However, it is important to state that a child's right to play is embedded in article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989). Furthermore, play is an important area for developing values, such as democracy, care for others, and warmth in interrelations.

But what is play anyway? And why is it so important to education? We would like to point out the following reasons:

1. Play has a particular meaning and a specific value of its own for the child. Play contains a strong attractiveness and is a main source of motivation.
2. Children explore, test out, and learn through play.
3. Through play, children develop a sense of competence and search for their identity.
4. Children develop social competences through play and become socialised. Through play, children are dealing with rules in their interactions with others. Thus they are developing more competences in these social areas. Play is a typical socio-cultural activity of the child. Children can also re-learn and re-establish the capability of play. An interesting example is the positive experiences obtained when organising play with traumatised children.

We would like to extract four dimensions as basic to our understanding of the concept of play (Levy 1978; Lillemyr 1999):

- intrinsic motivation
- children's suspension of reality
- internal locus of control
- play as social interaction and communication at different levels

The four dimensions help our understanding of play. However, the term 'play' still tends to evade definition. Several scholars call attention to the strength of play as such, as well as to play as a societal and cultural phenomenon. In regards to education, it is often argued that two perspectives of play should be incorporated (Lillemyr 2001):

- the unique value of play for its own sake
- learning through play

Consequences for our understanding of learning

Learning goes on in different types of context, such as the playground of schools or daycare institutions, at home, in after-school clubs, and during play sessions. Therefore,

today a broad concept of learning has to be realised in educational settings, as well as in other settings of life. We understand learning in a broad sense as (Lillemyr 1999; 2001):

1. internal processes caused by training/experiences, providing increased capacity to comprehend, experience, feel, reflect and act.
2. including acquisition of knowledge and skills, as well as applications, such as in experimentation and creativity.
3. comprising individual processes, influenced by social competence, feelings of relatedness - that is feeling socially related, related to a group, to a local area, to a small society, etc - and socio-cultural aspects.
4. affecting personality, and vice versa, as well as affecting the whole child.
5. changing the child's competence, and hence its sense of competence.

From this perspective we argue for a new concept of learning in different contexts, including in daily life situations, daycare institutions and in schools. Including play in education is a way towards a holistic approach to education (Framework Plan 1996). In recent years such an approach has been strongly advocated, as the contextual and relational perspectives seem fundamental to obtain a program adapted to all learners' needs. An integration between the approaches of early childhood education and those of primary school education is seen as a prerequisite in some recent school reforms, such as the new Curriculum Guidelines developed in Norway for primary and lower secondary schools (Curriculum Guidelines 1997). Furthermore, we emphasise the perspective of play in all life situations, especially where children are involved, such as in hospitals, leisure clubs, work with traumatised children, refugee camps, etc.

In our conception of early childhood education we integrate both learning and care. We believe that children learn a lot through quality care, and an excellent learning process will include caring aspects. Therefore, we cannot separate learning from care. We see play as one of many possible kinds of learning processes. This serves to illustrate our holistic approach to play and learning, taking the whole child and her/his self-worth as a point of departure.

Varied forms of play and learning

How, then, can varied forms of play and learning be promoted in educational settings, in daycare institutions and in schools? Prerequisites for an early childhood care and education strategy and policy should include:

- sufficient materials and suitable settings and areas (indoor and outdoor);
- emphasis on the phenomenological aspects of experience, that is the learning aspects rather than the affective aspects of learning.
- educational attitudes supporting children's needs for play (in particular free play);
- support of autonomy and the need for options in play and learning activities;
- organising play and learning as interchanging activities, with both teacher-directed and child-directed activities;
- quality-oriented care as basic to active play and learning;
- training educators in basic competences in play and learning in a broad sense.

In our opinion, promoting varied play and learning activities implies looking at learning from an early childhood education perspective. In the Norwegian curriculum guidelines, play is understood as imagination, trial and error, joint action, and a natural area for physical, social, and intellectual challenges (Curriculum Guidelines 1997).

Play:

- offers experience in mastering tasks and challenges, taking responsibility for oneself and others.
- is self-motivated and an important source of learning, especially during the early years.
- helps children develop language, concepts and communication competences.
- offers practice in using their physical and motor skills.
- teaches them co-operation and following rules.

The Framework Plan (1996) for daycare institutions outlines play as being voluntary, an activity a child chooses to participate in, and as an «as-if activity», partly outside the real world. Play expresses the most internal aspects of a human being. For that reason the Framework Plan suggests that learning through play has to be guided by the unique value of play.

Play, humour and creativity are closely linked (Søbstad 1999). Humour can be conceived as play with thoughts and words. When we tell or listen to jokes, we get into a playful mind. Remembering old jokes or twisting words is a creative way of meeting reality, such as the joy, excitement, problems and challenges of life. When observing children in play we see their creativity. Play is often accompanied with smiles and laughter. A common characteristic of humour, creativity and play is that you escape reality and move into another mental state, a state where adult logic and purposeful attitudes are excluded. The result of such a playful mind may be an exciting drawing, a joke or perhaps a new way of playing with dolls. Thus, play theories and educators in early childhood care and education must take into consideration the creative and humour aspects. In general, humour is an important force in social interaction and a vital aspect of early childhood care and education.

Such a global and holistic early childhood approach seems useful to many other settings, such as when working with children in sports, children in hospitals, children in refugee camps, or children in multicultural groups.

V Presentation of the proposed model

We feel the need for an alternative model in early childhood care and education. The model we introduce illustrates a new philosophy in this area. In our view, a child's environment in the past consisted of different institutions with limited contact with each other. The lack of regular contacts between families, nursery schools, primary schools, local health authorities, cultural and religious institutions and organizations could have been illustrated with a model where these units were isolated «islands» with few and narrow bridges. Boundaries between institutions and organizations taking care of young children were well-defined. In the model we propose, these educational areas are adjacent and overlapping.

Our model (Figure 2) intends to show a more complex and integrated system, allowing more integration and collaboration among early childhood care and education relevant activities. We hope this will help promote an education based on a more global and total approach to children's development and hence avoid professional fragmentation.

This model illustrates relations between areas within early childhood care and education as well as other closely related areas.

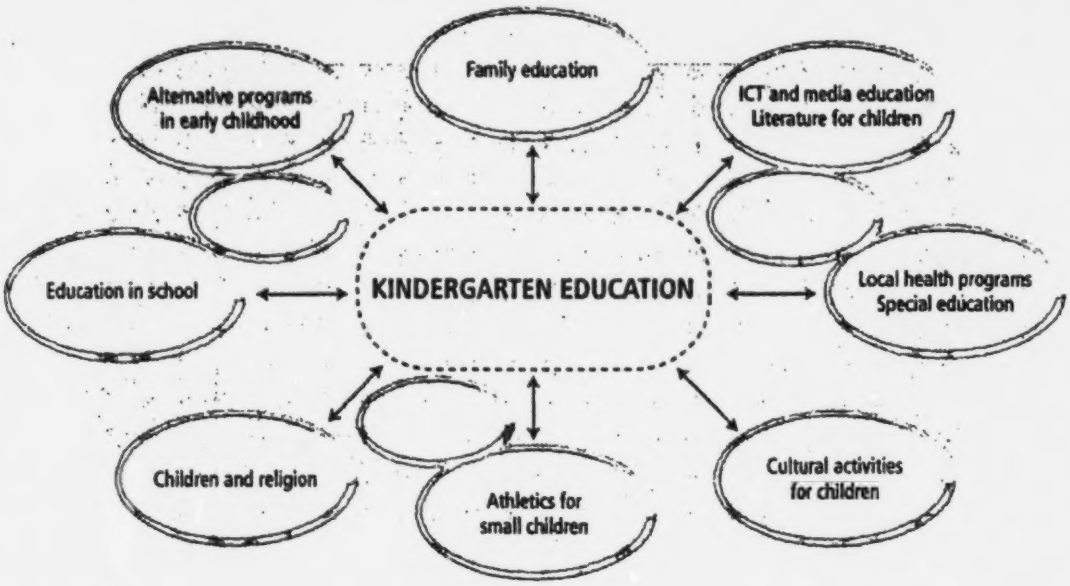

Figure 2 - Components of early childhood care and education: a dynamic model

The shaded area represents the field of early childhood care and education. In our view, early childhood care and education includes what is called kindergarten education, marked with a dotted line, but also some other areas, marked as circles at the edge of the shaded area. These are related to early childhood care and education, in addition to being connected to other areas of education, culture and society.

The model should be seen as an open model. This means that influences go in both directions: for instance, from family or religious education to kindergarten education, or vice versa. We consider this model as an open and dynamic system. It is never in stability, always moving towards a deeper and fuller understanding of what is best for children who could benefit from early childhood care and education activities.

Among all the elements in this model, the largest area in most Western countries is *kindergarten education*. Traditionally, education for young children has taken place in daycare institutions or other institutions. In some countries, public care and education for young children goes back a few hundred years. But typical kindergarten education stems from Friedrich Froebel, known as "the father of kindergarten", and the creation of the first kindergarten in Germany in 1840. Froebel formulated some important principles for kindergarten education, including closeness to nature, aesthetic activities and the importance of play. He also emphasised the need to have kindergarten education tuned into the child's level of development (Froebel 1982). Today it is apparent that many educational institutions for young children all over the world have been influenced by Froebel's thinking on *kindergarten education*, even though they may have other names and/or traditions.

Family education deals with the upbringing of children at home and how parents can support their children in their development. Many studies indicate that parents and siblings may be the most important factors influencing children's development. Therefore, it is vital for early childhood educators to discuss basic principles for family education with parents and help answer questions like: What kinds of toys are best for my one-year old? How much pocket money should I give my eight year old son? Should parents interfere with their child's choice of friends? In family education, there are basic dimensions linked to emotional climate and control. In this respect family

education includes important issues of general educational interest and fundamental in any situation that involves adults and children

Alternative programs in early childhood care and education vary from country to country according to the situation in each country. It is difficult to describe in a few words what characterizes the majority tradition in early childhood care and education. An important aspect of alternative programs is their very existence. Parents should have the opportunity to send their children to educational institutions that differ from the mainstream educational thinking in their country.

Today there is a growing interest in information and communication technology and *media education* for young children. Mass media and computers occupy a great deal of young children's leisure time. Media is often used in early childhood institutions. Important questions are linked to the choice of criteria for selecting good films, TV programs, and software that can provide young children with useful experiences and promote their development.

How can negative influences from media be avoided or prevented? How does media violence and advertising influence children's values, emotional development and priorities? What is the difference between training with a computer compared to traditional teaching? Are media and software the best avenues for promoting creativity? Questions like these are asked by parents and educators alike. Parents and educators often have strong beliefs about the influence of media on young children. At the same time there is a lot of optimism concerning media from the media industry and young people. Therefore we need to develop a media philosophy that can give us a realistic strategy in regards to the positive use of media, and to strengthening the qualities of traditional education.

Concerning *literature for children*, educators are usually well prepared to teach literature to young children, because they are well acquainted with the written media. What is quality in literature for children? Which attitudes and values should be encouraged? Both linguistic and literary criterias are relevant, but the young child's age and development must be considered when books and other reading materials are to be selected for them.

Children and religion may be an issue in preschool education. Many parents and educators reflect on the best way to help children acquire a conscious awareness of religious traditions. Religion has many functions, one of them being to give people answers to basic questions about life, a mental and social framework for their lives, and developing a sense of belonging and resilience. In early childhood care and education we need to take these perspectives into account. Furthermore religious texts and traditions often are based on stories, which may puzzle or scare young children. Therefore parents and educators need to identify which educational principles can help children relate to religious traditions.

Athletics for small children are concerned with physical activities, athletics and outdoor life for the young children. The aims of physical activities are important to clarify, in order to answer questions such as: Should children under five prepare for competitions, like a few selected ones did in the former German Democratic Republic? Should young children compete at all? What is the best balance between organised physical activities and free play activities? What are the positive effects of having babies swim with their parents? Should health/training clubs have special programs for young children?

The same is true for those who plan *cultural activities for children* such as drama, theatre and ballet performances, musical activities and visits to museums. What kinds of initiatives are required when young children learn to play the violin, the piano or other instruments? How well can a four year old child concentrate on tasks in a ballet or violin course? Should we try to avoid nurturing "wonder kids"? Is a new Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart an ideal? Can we find a balance between free play, positive experiences on the one hand, and knowledge and achievements on the other? For people planning a visit to a museum, or a librarian planning to tell fairy tales, they need to consider such questions. No doubt concerts and visits to art galleries, libraries,

churches, synagogues, temples or mosques can be important events in children's lives. In transferring culture to children, as adults we often speak on behalf of a tradition and from an adult perspective. In early childhood care and education there is more room to take the child's perspective into account and build on their curiosity and interests.

Early childhood care and education is also relevant to the *primary school.* There is a growing interest among teachers for the main early childhood care and education approaches, especially in terms of play. The importance of care, social interaction among children, teamwork and projects related to the local environment are increasingly being emphasised in the first grade of primary school. Daycare traditions seem to be influencing the school in a positive way, but in early childhood care and education, we should also be open to influence from the best aspects of primary school traditions.

Schools and daycare institutions co-operate with *local health authorities and agencies regarding special needs education.* In preventive health work, close relationships between educational institutions and local health authorities and services are important. These professionals know about unhealthy conditions in homes and dangerous local areas. They can be key persons in co-ordinating health, social and educational work directed towards children. In order to meet the needs of the whole child, we need more inter-professional cooperation and coordination.

Our model also contains a few *empty circles.* These circles represent areas that we have not described, but which are relevant to a complete view of early childhood care and education. Depending on national, regional or local conditions, it should be possible to adapt the model to different contexts.

VI Developing early childhood education theory

How can the development of early childhood education theory be assured and promoted? How can we promote *quality* in daycare and early childhood education? First of all, this is a question of integrating theory and practice in the field of early childhood care and education. In this regard, educators' co-operation with parents seems crucial as a foundation for obtaining high quality education and learning. Moreover, reflections on theory and practice have to be related to didactics or discussions on curriculum development. University colleges through their training of early childhood educators and primary school teachers should assume a principal responsibility for the development of theory in the field, in co-operation with educators in early childhood institutions and primary schools.

In our opinion, main development areas are the following:

- children's development as a point of departure for learning in a broad sense, in order to stimulate children to take responsibility for their own learning.
- play and social interactions, related to culture and identity.
- holistic education, emphasising multimedia and new understandings of childhood.
- occupational socialisation, that is the process of being socialised into a profession, as a teacher for instance.
- counselling and guidance in early childhood care and education.
- quality in planning and evaluation in early childhood care and education.
- educational themes and strategies, across subjects and institutional services.
- organisational development in early childhood institutions, schools and educational services.
- discussions of pursuing multicultural early childhood care and education.

To ensure proper development in these various areas, frequent contacts and cooperation between professors, students and preschool educators through research and development projects, teaching and social activities, etc are necessary.

All contributions to the development of the early childhood field will have to focus on a "best-for-the-child" perspective, in accordance with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. It is a challenge to all of us to define and discuss what is meant by *holistic education* which is so central to early childhood approaches today. Developments of our field need to draw upon all the main areas, such as research, education, and practice. For that reason, students in early childhood teacher training should be encouraged to reflect upon their future role. This will help them identify useful practice and develop a high level of competence, and contribute to high quality in their integration of theory and practice later in their future careers.

VII Conclusion

In this monograph we presented a new model for early childhood care and education. It is not conceived as an alternative to «old» models but, rather, as defining the early childhood field as overlapping and adjacent to several other educational areas. Our main intentions in presenting the model have been to:

1. present an overview of relevant aspects for an introduction to the field of early childhood care and education
2. present in a holistic perspective the characteristic areas and themes of the field
3. show the applicability of the model for areas other than early childhood care and education
4. indicate the necessity of a global perspective
5. suggest potential areas for further developments in early childhood.

In our global perspective on early childhood care and education, play is highlighted as one of the most important areas, because play is important for developing individuality and social competences, and is fundamental to the sense of well-being and the development of an integrated personality. To secure human rights, democracy and multicultural respect we all need a lifelong source of visions and strength, as well as a multicultural perspective on learning and development. All children need experiences of personal involvement, «make believe» and internal locus of control in their lives.

Our proposed model is based on five basic principles:

- a value-based theory and practice
- ethical responsibility and accountability
- democracy as a framework and an aim
- a holistic rather than fragmented approach
- a more open educational system

The most important characteristic of our model is the emphasis on *values* in all kinds of educational thinking. A value-oriented and scientific approach provides rich possibilities to see the child as a unique human being with societal rights. In this thinking, our philosophy is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, emphasising *the best interest of the child* as a main issue. We think a global perspective should include the child as a whole, as well as all children in the world.

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